

Power and the Pendulum by Alisa Pearce

by Words of Love for Meli

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\_A story for Meli by Alisa Pearce\_

\_3 April 2016\_

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**\*\*A/N:\*\*** Thanks to SunflowerFran for being our awesome beta! Pairing is B/E and the genre is romance/drama.

**\*\*Disclaimer:\*\*** The authors don't own \_Twilight\_ by Stephenie Meyer.

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**\*\*Chapter 1\*\***

"President Swan will see you now, Dr. Cullen." The secretary buzzed Edward in, coolly polite, although she could not disguise the slight blush on her cheeks after he flashed a flirtatious smirk at her and held her gaze for just a fraction of a second too long.

He sauntered into the luxurious, walnut-paneled office of the head of Volturi University.

Bella Swan was seated behind her desk, head bent over her paperwork.

Her face seemed stern, her lush auburn hair twisted back into a businesslike bun. A creamy silk blouse buttoned all the way up to her throat could be seen under the slate-gray suit jacket.

Behind her, floor-to-ceiling windows yielded a spectacular view, framed by thick green canopies of the venerable black oak trees that dotted the campus. The university grounds sloped off into the distance, neatly trimmed lawns surrounding turn-of-the-century architecture. In the background, the city and its new skyscrapers gleamed.

The university's endowment had done well over the past decade, and the city had ridden the wave of prosperity along with it. This quiet room, with its understated display of opulence, was the seat of power over a concealed financial juggernaut; it was ostensibly a non-profit. However, the university controlled the lives of tens of thousands of people and billions of dollars in revenue.

Edward slid gracefully into one of the mahogany ribbon-backed chairs in front of the huge slab of a desk, hiding a smirk as she ignored him and busied herself with her work. Although Swan put up a forbidding, polished front, he knew all too well her soft underside. Gazing at her chest, his lips twitched. Very soft.

It was fine. He would be patient and allow her to play her gamesâ€”for a while. Idly, he leaned back in the chair, stretching out his long legs, took his cell phone from his pocket and fiddled with it. As he expected, it did not take long for her to become restless, as she often had in the old days. With an audible sigh, she flipped pages back and forth. His amusement grew, although he didn't allow it to show on his face.

Bella stared resolutely at the papers on the desk before her, although she did not see a single word of the neatly typed text. She had been dreading this interview. She had thought more than once of ordering a subordinate to conduct it, or, of skipping the preliminaries and moving directly to convening an employee disciplinary hearing.

But that would have been cowardly.

And if there was one thing Bella Swan was not, it was a coward.

She had never wanted to be an administrator, to be responsible for the well-being of thousands of university staff. However, her patents were one of the largest sources of the institution's revenue, so she had been encouragedâ€”no, beggedâ€”to enter the administration of her beloved university. And indeed, under her leadership, it had prospered.

Last year, though, exhausted from the demands of the position, she had asked to step down to return to her lab and her research. But the board of regents had insisted she stay on as president. She was needed, they asserted, desperately needed.

So here she still was. Doing something she dreaded above all else. She took a moment to gaze out the window at the peaceful, tree-lined vista.

Finally, she shut the folder she was pretending to read. She fixed an

attempt at a severe gaze on the man lounging in one of her office chairs. She could not help taking in a sharp breath as she stared into his classically handsome features; his large, intense green eyes beneath dark brows. It had been such a long time since she had seen him up close that she had almost forgotten how physically beautiful he was. He sprawled lazily in the chair, one elbow propped casually on an armrest, regarding her with amused tolerance. She frowned. \_He\_ was the one who should be nervous here, not her.

"I've asked you to speak with me today to address some very serious allegations." She tugged at a loose strand of hair briefly and then deliberately stilled her hand and placed it flat on the table.

Edward looked politely inquiring. "Allegations?" he murmured. "So you have no proof." He smiled.

She scowled. "You're making this deliberately difficult."

He shrugged and leaned his head against the back of the chair, thick lashes falling over his eyes, elegant face tilting, allowing more of the pale skin of his throat to become visible above his open-collared black shirt. Damn the man. Why did he have to be so inhumanly attractive? She pressed her lips tightly together and rustled the paper in front of her. "As a faculty member of this university," she began in a harsh tone of voice, "you know very well the rules regarding fraternization between a professor and a student."

Edward stirred. "Fraternization? Come now." He laughed, the rich baritone setting Bella's skin buzzing underneath her constricting clothes. She twisted uncomfortably in her seat. "You're using distancing language, Bella. You know what that means."

She frowned at his use of her first name. "I have here six horrific allegations, all from young students at this university. A student in your freshman English literature class maintains that you insinuated that she could obtain an A if she, um, performed sexual favors for you in your office."

"I have no need to bribe women for sex." His lips curved into a wicked smile. "As you well know."

Bella cleared her throat. "Another student claims that you took her out to dinner and plied her with wine and other alcoholic drinks. She woke up in the morning in a hotel bed with Jasper Hale."

"Am I to blame for Hale's escapades?"

"Another young lady alleges that you persuaded her and her best friend to spend the night in your house, and then the three of you—"the three of you—" She stammered and ground to a halt. "The girl was later admitted to the hospital with whip scars and rope burns around her wrists, ankles, and neck."

Edward shrugged. "Is it my fault if the younger generation is—" He met her eyes, then continued delicately, "adventurous in their sexual play? Does anyone question whether their acts were consensual?"

Bella slammed her hand down on the desk, eyes burning. "The point is

that it's unprofessional conduct for you to have sexual relations with students, Edward! Whether or not they consented, although some of them do seem to have doubt on that subject."

There was silence in the room for a moment. Then Edward rose and glided unhurriedly around the desk. Bella stiffened in her chair. "What are you doing?"

He ignored her question, looming over her—"too close, far too close"—and regarding her with the faintest tinge of amusement on his full lips. This was not how a disciplinary meeting with a subordinate should go. She was in charge here. She should get up, shout for help, tell him in a firm voice to leave at once. But she could not move. Paralyzed, all she could do was stare at him, as he drew ever closer. He placed both hands on the armrests of her chair, boxing her in. Slowly, slowly he bent down until his lips touched her ear. She shivered with a sudden, intense thrill at his proximity, at the touch of his breath on the shell of her ear.

"You should be more judicious," he murmured, her skin tingling as his lips grazed her ear, "with the words you bandy about, my dear, lest you be accused of hypocrisy. 'Unprofessional'?" He paused. "What of your own actions?" he whispered, and gave the rim of her ear a long, deliberate lick.

All her blood felt like it was rushing to her head as his tongue traced the sensitive inner shell of her ear and her breathing quickened. "I—"you know I didn't want—"since we—"I haven't done—" she stammered. Taking a deep breath, she stiffened and leaned as far away from him as she could. But she could not look away from his finely chiseled features, his vivid, intense eyes. Her heart pounded madly and her body registered the warmth of his skin against hers, his clean scent, the elegant feel of the expensive fabric of his suit. No. She was not going to allow herself to feel attraction to this man. No, she wailed internally, as something traitorous began to smolder deep within her core.

His expression was calm and reflective as he regarded her. "You didn't want—" he murmured, one long-fingered hand reaching out, the tips of his fingers stroking along her jawline.

At the touch of his hand, the creeping sparks of desire ignited with a flash and roared through her entire body, leaving her shaking under the onslaught of a wholly inappropriate, dark craving. She cursed her own hormones. Deep within her, a small, seductive voice whispered to her. \_Submit,\_ it breathed. \_Indulge yourself just once.\_

No. She had to ignore it. Edward Cullen was treacherous, perfidious, and amoral. There was no reason she, a respectable, even powerful university president, should have any feelings whatsoever for this man. And if she had in the past or even still did, she needed to quash them. Now. Not just for herself, but for all the people who depended upon her, for all the innocents who might become Edward's victims. "It was a mistake," she muttered through clenched teeth. "I made an error in judgment."

His eyes widened in mock innocence. "How quickly you abandon me, Bella." His lips curled slightly. "I seem to recall you begging me to stay." His searching fingers caressed her throat, slid downwards to gently tug at the fabric of her blouse, one fingertip delicately

insinuating itself under her neckline and running along her quivering skin. "You, yourself, asked me to touch you," he murmured, "hereâ€| and hereâ€|" His other hand boldly traced a teasing curve along the inside of her inner thigh and she gasped as a jolt of desire fired her core.

She uttered a strangled cry that was half moan and writhed in the chair. "Not again, I promised myselfâ€"

Edward's eyes glittered beneath heavy lids, a lock of tousled reddish hair brushing the clear skin of his forehead. "Bella." His voice was like chocolate, sweet and sinful, deep and dark, dark, dark. "You know you still want me," he whispered.

"No," she insisted, shaking her head.

He leaned forward and she closed her eyes, turning her head away. One hand skated over the back of her neck, and he loosened her bun so that her hair fell over her shoulders. Her scalp eased as her hair tumbled loose and warm across her back. His hands plunged into her curls and he gave a low hum of pleasure.

"Your hair is still beautiful, Bella. What a shame that you keep it so harshly imprisoned."

"Stop it." But her voice lacked conviction, even to her. His clever fingers worked at the buttons at her throat, one, two, three. The air felt cool on her bare skin, and he caressed her throat. She sighed and arched her back.

"Do you truly wish me to stop?"

"We're in my office!" she protested. What was she doing? Her assistant could come in any time; she was supposed to be reprimanding Cullen and placing a letter in his official record; she knew he was using her simply to avoid punishment; he might, noâ€he would blackmail her; he would threaten her with scandal. And it was so, so wrong to be involved with Cullen in any possible way. She knew better. She knew better now; she knew all too well what kind of a man he was. He had no boundaries whatsoever; he scorned common decency and claimed morality was 'tedious.'

But he pressed himself against her, his thigh sliding ever so slowly between her legs, and she could not help another intake of breath at the sensation. What were her arguments again? Her mind fuzzed and her thoughts fled. His weight held her down, immobilizing her, her skin thrilling at his touch. Why did she suddenly feel in such exhilarating danger and at the same time so protected from the world around her? As his hands explored her skin tantalizingly slowly, all she could feel was longing.

Her body relaxed and opened and she tingled all over, as though her skin were finally breathing after a decade of imprisonment.

His mouth hovered over hers and his breath feathered warm against her face. "That's no answer, Bella," he murmured, a smile in his voice. "Don't you remember how good we were together?" he whispered. "Don't you want that again? I've missed you so much, Bella. You don't know how lonely I've been."

At that, fury surged through her and she pushed him away. "Lonely? With a different girl in your bed every night?" Her voice rose. "How dare you spew such lies to me, Edward?"

"I loved you, Bella." His moss-green eyes glittered with "was it tears? "I still love you."

She shook her head, as much to convince herself as to deny his words. "You have a line for every girl, don't you, Edward? A polished technique that has nothing to do with the truth. It's simply whatever works to get you a moment's pleasure. You talk about love, but you don't care about the feelings of those you use." Her voice broke.

"No," he murmured, laying his soft cheek alongside hers. "I swear, you are different from all of them. I only turned to them because I could not have you. Because you left me."

"\_I\_ left \_you\_?" Her voice cracked in disbelief. "I seem to recall that \_you\_ made that decision."

"It was never my choice. You found fault with my behavior, although it was what you wanted too."

"You \_what\_? I "mmph" He took her lips in his and a wave of desire, of helpless craving, pooled in her center. It made her knees weak, made her mind shut down until her hands found his lush, warm hair. She clung to him, allowed him to ravage and explore her mouth. His kiss was possessive, violent, all-consuming, and it made her wail inside even as she melted before him. His lips and tongue and teeth tore at her, and his hands slipped inside her clothes and ignited her skin.

\_No,\_ she thought. \_No, not again.\_ But somehow her body ignored her, as it had on that day so long ago

End  
file.